

fast FACTS...

December 2003

about Sedgwick County Government



Influenza (Flu) Fast facts

What is influenza?

Influenza (flu) is a viral infection of the nose, throat, bronchial tubes and lungs. There are different strains of the flu that tend to change each year.

Who can get influenza?

Anyone can get the flu (even healthy people), and serious problems from influenza can happen at any age. People age 65 years and older, people of any age with chronic medical conditions, and very young children are more likely to get complications from influenza. Pneumonia, bronchitis, and sinus and ear infections are three examples of complications from flu.

When does influenza occur?

Most often, influenza occurs during the winter months. Illnesses with like symptoms can occur in summer months, but are most often caused by other viruses.

How is influenza spread?

Influenza is transmitted through contact with droplets from the nose and throat of an infected person during coughing and sneezing. Influenza is highly contagious.

What are the symptoms of influenza?

Most often influenza symptoms include:

- Headache
- Fever
- Tiredness (can be extreme)
- Dry Cough
- Sore Throat
- Nasal Congestion
- Body Aches

Intestinal symptoms are uncommon. Most people with the flu are typically sick for a few days, however, some people can develop a more serious illness, such as pneumonia, and may require hospitalization.

For more information:

Sedgwick County Health Department
660-7392

Sedgwick County Website
www.sedgwickcounty.org

For the latest updates on influenza in Kansas, visit the Kansas Influenza information website <http://www.kdhe.state.ks.us/flu/index.html>

How soon do symptoms appear after contracting influenza and how long is a person contagious?

Typically symptoms appear between one to three days after infection. A person infected with influenza is normally contagious the day before symptoms appear and can last up to a week.

Is there a treatment for influenza?

Influenza is caused by a virus, so antibiotics (like penicillin) don't work to cure it. There are prescription and anti-viral drugs that doctors may prescribe to decrease the duration of symptoms. These medications do not decrease the serious complications of influenza and they must be administered within 48 hours of the onset of the illness.

What should you do if you get influenza?

Contact your medical provider first if you are experiencing cold or flu symptoms that you believe require medical attention. Get plenty of rest, drink plenty of liquids, avoid using alcohol and tobacco, and use aspirin or acetaminophen to reduce fever. Due to the risk of Reye's Syndrome, aspirin and other medications containing salicylate should not be given to children.

Sedgwick County
Health Department

1900 E. Ninth

Wichita, Kansas

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Is there a way to prevent influenza?

Routine immunizations (flu shots) are the most effective way to control influenza. All high-risk individuals should be vaccinated every year. Because the strains of influenza vary from year to year, it is important to receive a vaccination each year. Those who receive annual vaccinations tend to have milder illness and are less likely to be hospitalized from complications.

The Sedgwick County Health Department also recommends the following steps to help prevent the spread of the flu:

- Wash hands frequently
- Cover your mouth when you cough and sneeze
- Stay healthy and eat well
- Get plenty of rest
- Stay home when you are ill, to avoid spreading the virus

How effective is the Flu Vaccine this year?

The flu vaccine is usually around 80 percent effective in preventing illness from the influenza virus. This means that it is possible to get influenza after having the vaccine, but even when illness occurs, symptoms are usually less severe and complications less frequent.

Is there a shortage of the Flu Vaccine?

Due to the increased demand from the public and limited availability of the vaccine from the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Sedgwick County Health Department has restricted flu shot immunizations to those considered "high risk" at this time.

Who is considered "High Risk?"

Those considered "High Risk" include those individuals that are:

- 6 months to 23 months of age
- Individuals who are 50 and older
- Individuals in nursing homes
- Individuals with a chronic illness or a weakened immune system
- Children/teenagers on long-term aspirin therapy
- Women in their second or third trimester of pregnancy
- Health care workers, family members or anyone coming in close contact with people at risk

I am not considered "High Risk," can I still get a flu shot?

Those individuals not considered "High Risk" should check with their medical provider for the availability of the flu shot.



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